

Project Concept and Definition

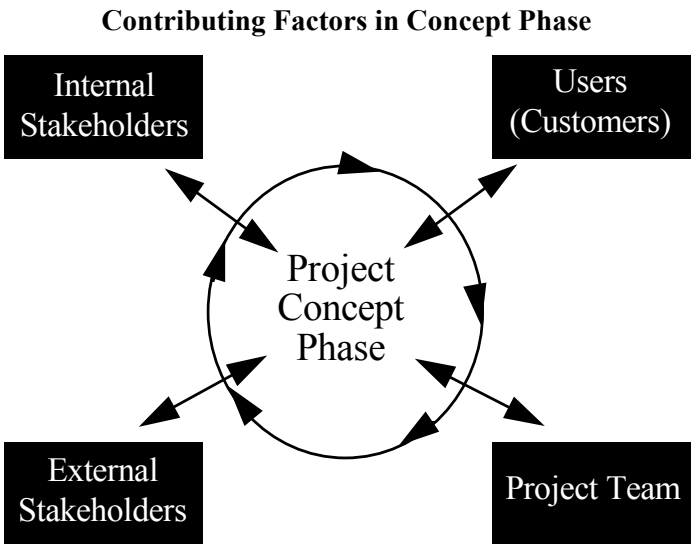
Introduction

Initial Release	1.0
Date:	January 1997

The Concept Phase

This section of the Project Management Methodology is related to the concept and definition phase of a project. Although there is no uniform agreement on the specific stages of a project and the associated management processes that follow, there is agreement that for a project to exist, it must begin.

This starting point is critical because it is essential at this point for those who will deliver the technology, those who will use that technology, and those who have a stake in the project to reach agreement on its concept and definition. The process is represented in the figure below.



Elements of the Concept Phase

Defined in this section are general guidelines to assist in defining the overall parameters of the project during the concept phase. The actual sections have been organized to be consistent on how a project might progress through the concept phase.

Currently under review are the actual documents that must be submitted outside the state organization to get a project initiated and approved. When that process has been completed, this section will be updated to be consistent with the actual required format. As stated in each of the actual sections, however, the principles and processes that are necessary to develop initial information about a project will not change.

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It must be stressed that the recommended methods in this section are standard steps for IT development efforts, since it is here that agreement is reached on what the project's end product(s) will be. The basic processes for the project concept phase are:

- Development of a project statement (sometimes called concept statement)
- Completion of a business analysis
- Review of the project's concept

Each of these will be discussed briefly below and addressed fully in the appropriate documents in this section.

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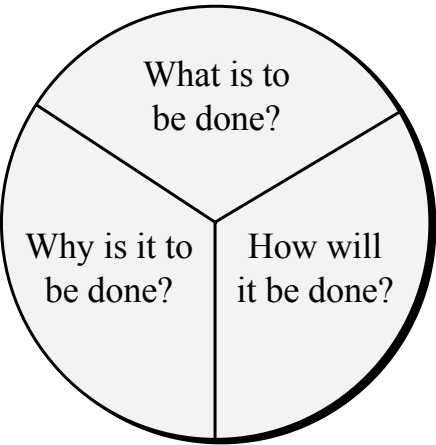
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Project Statement

The Project Statement defines the project’s charter and ensures that the project is consistent with the state organization’s business plan and IT strategic plan. It defines a high-level approach, project success factors, and other top-level planning information. Ideally, the information contained in the Project Statement provides both internal and external management with the information necessary to decide if the project can be supported.

The Project Statement should not be a collection of technical information, but should state what is to be done, why it is to be done, and what business value it will provide to the state organization when the project is completed. Components of the Project Statement are shown in the following figure:

Major Questions to be Answered During the Concept Phase



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Business Analysis

Analyzing project constraints, alternatives, and related assumptions is also part of the initial concept phase. Again, this material has been organized to build upon the material already presented in the project statement. These steps, in many cases, will be going on while the initial project plan is being developed. Every caution should be taken to keep these activities at a high level in the organization so that they do not result in a project design document.

There are four basic components to the analysis:

- Definition of project constraints and assumptions
- List of weaknesses and strengths as defined with the risk identification
- Stakeholder and customer analysis
- Top level functional specifications

Concept Review

This process is currently being defined as part of the initiation process analysis. This document will be updated when that process is complete. There may be times when actual reviews need to be scheduled with the project team and external agencies. These reviews would provide a forum for information exchange and would be more timely than written question and answer sessions.

No separate document exists to refine the review process. The contents and structure of the meeting will be driven by the materials generated during the initial statement and analysis process.

The Concept Atmosphere

The atmosphere during the concept phase is marked by indecision and hesitation and characterized by:

- **Project Team Frustration**

The desire of the project staff to get the project moving and to start designing the solution never seems to come.

- **Management Non-Commitment**

There is a lack of full commitment on the part of management; usually, there is too little known with just presenting a "fuzzy" idea, and the project teams cannot provide more than rough estimates for "how much and how long."

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Problems during the Concept Phase

- **Customer Indecision**

The customer (user) seems unable to provide definitions and concepts of what the required system is to provide.

Many problems during the concept phase are due to the difficulty in getting a project to move forward. This is a direct result of the atmosphere defined above. The most difficult commitment to obtain is from the key stakeholders (top management) and customers (users). A summary of some of these problems is highlighted below:

- **Scarcity of Resources**

Many of the problems are related to assembling the initial project concept team. Locating the "right" people is rarely easy, and it is even more difficult for the more complex projects.

- **Lack of Coordinated Leadership**

While qualified team members may be in short supply, individuals serving as leaders may be numerous. In many cases, the concept phase is led by too many people -- some for the estimating, some for the user meetings, and so forth. Such environments create an atmosphere of bad or disjointed decision making.

- **Lack of Consensus on the Project Objectives**

It is not uncommon to find that there are many different ideas as to what the project should be and what the project should produce. Rapid prototyping can be useful when general agreement on the concept is difficult to reach. Concepts are often easier to integrate when the team is considering something concrete.

Who Does What?

The responsibilities for the project concept phase are:

Project Team - Conducts user, stakeholder, and fact-finding interviews and holds technical research and brainstorming sessions to generate the information necessary for a concept document to be prepared. The project team is also responsible for the completion of the project statement and analysis materials. They may also need to complete the project initiation materials.

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State organization -
Establishes internal
procedures to ensure that
conceptual activities are
completed and that the
concept documents are
completed in a manner
that allows for productive
review.

Finance - Reviews
submitted concept
documents.

n it is finished.

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